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MR SPEAKER TOOK THE CHAIR AT 10.00 A.M.

OPENING PRAYER

MR SPEAKER (T. TURA): All be seated. I bring the Parliament to Order. Kia Orana to all Honourable Members of this House and also to the staff of Parliament, Kia Orana this morning. A special Kia Orana to our Chaplain who gave us a good message this morning, which I think is more applicable to all Members of this House.

Kia Orana also to our people listening in from the Northern and Southern Group and also to our people of Rarotonga, Kia Orana this morning. Special Kia Orana to our people overseas listening in, Kia Orana to all of you and God bless.

I have no announcements this morning.

Honourable Members, we have come to Question Time and this will be for 30 minutes.

QUESTION TIME

The last person speaking yesterday was the Honourable Albert Nicholas; you have the Floor.

MR A. NICHOLAS: Thank you, Mr Speaker and a beautiful morning to you. To the Clerk, your Deputy and your staff and all Members in this House greetings to you all. To our people listening over the radio and other means of hearing this sitting, to the breadth, the length and to the encirclement of our country, greetings to you all.

Mr Speaker, like what I had mentioned yesterday, ICI in partnership with Waste Management Cook Islands, Mr Speaker have considered a number of incinerator models, considered a number of suppliers who could potentially supply us with the necessary equipment to deal with our waste. Suppliers such as Asher Model, a company out of Malaysia, Mr Speaker, Intherma Industries, Mr Speaker a company out of Germany and Incinerate, a company that supplies incinerators out of UK.

This is just a few of the companies and suppliers that the Agency has been in talks with over the last few months. ICI is currently putting together the terms of reference for seeking expressions of interest from companies both foreign and domestic who may be interested in providing the appropriate equipment for us to deal with waste.

A call for EOI submissions will open on 1 June this year, Mr Speaker. This will open on the 1st June and will close by 27 July 2022, Mr Speaker.

Following that process, Mr Speaker requests for tender will be issued by 30 September 2022 and tender submissions will close on 25 November 2022.

The Honourable Member from Ruauu had queried the funding of this particular programme. I can confirm to the Honourable Member and this House and our people listening to this programme this morning, Mr Speaker that this programme concerning the incinerator for our waste programme, this programme will be funded through the ITF fund or the New Zealand Infrastructure Trust Fund. So Mr Speaker, I hope the information that I have laid before the House satisfies the Honourable Member's query. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member and now I see the Honourable Member Vaitoti Tupa; you have the Floor.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Mr Speaker. My question is more of a request because I am not the type of person who is shy to ask for help. When I saw the Honourable Minister George Angene in his uniform, therefore my question will be directed to him. I can see he is wearing a green and gold uniform. My question to you Honourable Minister is, I heard that you will be putting up a dome and you have received a dome. I heard that this dome will be established in Tupapa/Maraerenga. Therefore, my question is, is it possible to get one for Matavera? Mr Speaker, if you look at Matavera, it is just a small village. But the thing I like about this village is the six different Denominations in it. This is what I wanted to ask, if a dome can be established in the village of Matavera. Thank you very much.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Minister George Angene; you have the Floor.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Mr Speaker. The question posed is if it is possible! This is not a question, it is a request. The request is, to build a dome for Matavera. Your request Honourable Member Vaitoti Tupa, it will be granted. It is now my turn to ask you for a favour. I ask that you move over to this side of the House, I will guarantee you that you will get your dome next week. In regards to this request, I did thought about it for all Members of Parliament. In 2012, I requested a bobcat, a digger and a weight lifting truck. Instead, my request was denied. However, I believe that what the Member of Parliament have requested, because we have a strong relationship with the people of China. I believe, I can get one for each one of us. We need to work together and be surrounded with the unity of our Lord.

Honourable Member, we will have a chat about your request, not just for you, but for all of us. Amen.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. I see the Honourable Member William Heather; I am sure he is going to ask for one for Ruauu.

MR W. HEATHER: Thank you Mr Speaker. Good morning to you and all Members of this House and the staff of Parliament, including all of our people listening in on our radio. I want to direct my question to the Prime Minister because he is the leader of our country and he is also the Minister Responsible for Finance.

My question is, in the past few days, we all know that there are eggs hatching in Arorangi from around Edgewater and from Blackrock to the school in Arorangi with eggs along the beaches. With eggs hatching in this area, even around restaurants and on the side of the main road, what can be done to sort this problem out because Ruauu have raised some concerns about this problem? That is my question Honourable Prime Minister, I will await for your favorable response. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Mark Brown.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Mr Speaker, I pity this request from Puaikura. I think when we look at the Appropriation for this year, there is an allocation for our road development, nearly \$7 million. At the moment, there is work on the road leading to the Avatiu valley. This is one of the worst roads on our islands and it needs to be improved.

When that is finished, we will begin from Turangi to the Church in Aroko. This project will finish in Titikaveka, an area where this project has not started yet and we will work our way towards Vaimaanga. After Titikaveka, we will make our way into Arorangi. The aim here is, the companies that are conducting this work, they want the job done and they do not want to sit around, in fact, they want push this work forward.

Therefore, this is a priority for the Government. When the work on one side of the road is completed, we will begin straight away with Puaikura. We know that Puaikura is a place where eggs are hatched for the country. Sometimes, there are bad eggs but sometimes, you good get good eggs. So, that is my reply to your question Honourable Member. Thank you Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister, I see the Honourable Member Tamaiva Tuavera; you have the Floor.

MR T. TUAVERA: Thank you Mr Speaker. Firstly, I would like to thank the Minister George Angene because the eastern stars of Ngatangia is coming up, the star is rising. The house you were talking about earlier, we would need it in Ngatangia.

Looking at the Budget book, there is funding and we have borrowed \$130 million to fund our response to COVID.

My question is directed to the Minister of Health. In this instant, our main focus is COVID. With the Health system, do they also cover the dental within the Health system? I have been to the dental clinic in Tupapa and what I saw have shocked me. The hygiene level is not as high as it

used to be. When I had an x-ray for my teeth, the tube of the x-ray was not clean. If you want to find out yourself, so to the dental clinic and check for yourselves.

My question is, is dental included in this COVID fund because the hygienic level is very poor.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera. I see the Honourable Minister Rose Toki-Brown; you have the Floor.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Thank you. Kia Orana Mr Speaker, Clerk and staff of Parliament, our Interpreters and our people listening in on our radio. Thank you to the Honourable Member of Ngatangia for the question. Yes, the expenditure of the Ministry of Health (MOH) does not disregard the different parts that is controlled by MOH. I wanted to confirm to everybody today that we have received new equipment for our Hospital within the dental department. Before COVID arrived, we did some inspection in our dental clinics. But due to COVID, this work was postponed.

In reference to your query about the hygiene of this clinic, I wanted to inform you all that we have staff members allocated to clean our Hospital including Managers whose responsibility is to monitor their work. I am quite disappointed with your query but I will investigate this myself in rectifying this problem. Thank you very much.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. I see the Honourable Selina Napa; you have the Floor.

MRS S. NAPA: I have a Supplementary Question to the Minister of Health. To the Honourable Minister, I am aware that MOH has expended quite a sum of money during COVID on our dental clinic in Titikaveka, the only problem is that there is no dentist on our side.

The purpose of this clinic is to allow our people residing in this area of Takitumu, including Rutaki, to visit this clinic for dental treatment. If this facility is not being used, this property will deteriorate and all its equipment inside of it.

My question to the Honourable Minister is, will there be a dentist employed for this clinic of Takitumu and will MOH consider in utilizing this clinic in Titikaveka?

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Minister; you have the Floor.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Kia Orana everybody. Thank you to the Honourable Member of Titikaveka for the good question. Today, we struggle in recruiting dentists for our dental clinics. However, I am excited to inform everybody that we were able to recruit a dentist who is a Specialist as well. We have also discovered that his partner is also a dentist from overseas. They will be able to assist our dental department, not only for Rarotonga, but for the Outer Islands as well. Our plan for the dental clinic in your Constituency Honourable Member, we will look into utilising that clinic as the money used to renovate the clinic is from the Government.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister. I see the Honourable Member, Tetangi Matapo; you have the Floor.

MRS T. MATAPO: Good morning to everyone. I appreciate the answers from the Ministers. I rise on behalf of Outer Islands, especially the island of Mangaia. When I heard the discussion about the dental equipment in Titikaveka, it is a bit different for Mangaia because we have nothing. Honourable Minister, you were saying that you will carry out an investigation in this area, I just wanted to let you know that our dentist followed us to Rarotonga and if you can have the dental equipment checked. Last week, I went to the dental clinic and the machine they were using was leaking. As the Minister have mentioned about hygienic, this is different. The dental equipment works but is leaking onto patients.

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Member, can you ask your question?

MRS T. MATAPO: My question and my request is for the Minister to check this out herself.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I will ask the Honourable Minister to take your seat to allow time to prepare an answer for tomorrow.

Thank you Honourable Members, we have come to the end of Question Time.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRESENTATION OF PUBLIC BILLS (PART XXXI)

Our first Bill for presentation is the Ombudsman Amendment Bill 2022. I call the Honourable Minister Vaine Mokoroa; you have the Floor.

HON. V. MOKOROA: Thank you Mr Speaker, good morning to all of us. I stand to present before the House the Ombudsman Amendment Bill 2022.

CLERK AT THE TABLE (T. VAINERERE): Short Title: Ombudsman Amendment Act 2022.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MR SPEAKER: Can the Honourable Minister please name the date and time for the Second Reading of the Bill?

HON. V. MOKOROA: After the Appropriation Bill 2022 Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister Mokoroa. The Ombudsman Amendment Bill 2022 is ordered for the Second Reading, after the Appropriation Bill 2022.

Our second Bill for presentation is the Criminal Justice (Validation of Parole Reappointments) Bill 2022. I call the Honourable Minister George Angene, to present the Bill.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Mr Speaker. I stand to present before the House, the Criminal Justice (Validation of Parole Reappointments) Bill 2022.

CLERK AT THE TABLE: Short Title: Criminal Justice (Validation of Parole Reappointments) Bill 2022.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MR SPEAKER: Can the Honourable Minister, please name the date and time for the Second Reading of the Bill?

HON. G. ANGENE: Mr Speaker, after the Ombudsman Amendment Bill 2022.

MR SPEAKERS: Thank you Honourable Minister, George Angene. The Criminal Justice (Validation of Parole Reappointments) Bill 2022 is ordered for the Second Reading, after the Ombudsman Amendment Bill 2022.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Interrupted debate on the Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2022.

The Motion for the Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2022 was seconded by the Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera yesterday. I now open the Floor to the Honourable Members to debate on the Principles and Merits of the Bill. You have 20 minutes of speaking time.

I recognize the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa; you have the Floor.

MR. V. TUPA: Thank you very much Mr Speaker. I ask if my time can be stopped because I want to express a few words of condolences to a family in Matavera. These are words of comfort to the passing of a Mama Sally Tukurangi Hosking who have passed away last week in New Zealand. Her body will be returned to Rarotonga on Monday 30th May at 2.00 p.m. Therefore, on behalf of this Honourable House, I would like to pass on our condolences to her family.

I would like to share my thoughts on the Appropriation Bill that was presented by the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance stated that this Appropriation Bill has being named as the Appropriation of Faith. Mr Speaker, this could be true. My own interpretation of this Appropriation Bill is the Appropriation for Development. Nevertheless, if we refer back to the revenue that we have generated because our revenue for last year is \$300 million. Within this Appropriation Mr Speaker, we were given \$320 million. To me, this extra \$20 million is for the increase in our Old Age Pension, including the increase of 50c for the Minimum Wage.

In his presentation, he also outlined the work that we will be doing for this year. He also looked at the situation of our country. We all know that during the COVID pandemic period, our living cost have deteriorated.

From 2019 to 2020, there was a decrease of 7.9 percent. From 2020 – 2021, there was a further decrease of minus 14.5 percent. But from 2021 – 2022, we can see that there is an increase of up to 12 percent. So from the lending that we have carried through it has increased to 12 percent.

Our Prime Minister also mentioned about tourism in our country and the situation we were in back in 2019. In his Ministerial Statement, he stated that we have looked at the month of April and according to their Budget preparation, there has been an increase.

The Prime Minister also mentioned about inflation including suggestions or plans on how we can address this. We know that there will be an increase in inflation starting this year and for the next six years. Even the expenditure of government spending.

Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister also stated in his Statement of some funding such as, cash reserves, net debt and investment rules. According to the Prime Minister, there is nothing much we can do and it looks like that we will meet the maximum target of 65 percent on our GDP.

When we look at the plans that has been arranged, we have reached 50 percent in process of our GDP. The plan is, what can we do for us not to reach the 65 percent point?

Mr Speaker, I can also see what the Prime Minister have stated about the expenditure we have because starting this year, it has been outlined how the spending process will be. Mr Speaker, the important part of this is for our people to understand how our money are being spent. This is why I said that the name of this Budget should be named the Appropriation for Development.

When we look at our cash reserve, we know that our cash reserve was around about \$50 to \$55 million. We know that for this year 2022/23, the proposal is that we will have a cash reserve of about \$20 million. When we think about the proposals, I believe with what the Government have proposed, I know that the Government have met what they have proposed. The reason why I said that it has been met because it has from 2019. When we look at the remaining proposals, how can we implement this? According to a Mungaian saying, the expenditure in terms of growth, we will see from last year that we have reached \$133. In this years' appropriation, we may be able to get \$154 million. This is what I see in this Appropriation and proposals for expenditure.

I do commend the Government, the Prime Minister and the staff of MFEM for guiding us through the Appropriation Bill.

I would like to bring everybody's attention to our Revenue. Last year, we noticed how there was an increase but a minimal increase. However, when we look at this year's Budget, there has been increase in Revenue. I am not saying that there is a massive increase, I am saying that there is a slight increase. Mr Speaker, it could be the \$20 that is in discussion, I am not sure and also, the 50 cent increase in the Minimum Wage. These are my thoughts on the Appropriation Bill that is being presented.

When we look at fundings from overseas, this is one thing I would like to bring to the attention of the Government of today, our connection to OECD. We have considered this when our Select Committee meet when we discuss the Appropriation. I believe that we can put a request through

for our placing to be reinstated and once our financial situation stabilizes, we can consider moving back to our original placing. I do know that the Prime Minister has considered this. So for me, we should all work together for this progress through.

Mr Speaker, I would like to talk about Capital Investments. I believe that our situation with Capital Investment is steady. When we look at fundings from overseas, we can find from last year that Budget from last year was presented close to \$40 million. However, the proposals we see in the Appropriation for this year, we may reach \$80 to \$100 million. Mr Speaker, this is a funding that we have received from our overseas donors and I want our people to know and to understand the importance of this funding.

From our side of the Opposition, we want to know the effective of this for our people, therefore, we will support this. When we talk about the Departments that are benefiting these funds, I see that some of these major departments are using these funds to help our people.

Mr Speaker, please bear with me as my time is nearly up, I have a lot to say.

Mr Speaker, another item I would like to touch base on is what the Mangaian people would say, the Projects of the Cook Islands. According to our procedures that is being stated in the Ministerial Statement presented by the Prime Minister, it is what is being presented in the Appropriation. I am pleased to see how successfully this is for you Rarotonga. As we have heard the Prime Minister stating that this will help some parts here on Rarotonga. He stated that the road projects will continue from Avatiu to Turangi. But I would like to suggest for you not to start in Turangi, until Takitumu School and the CICC Church area is completely tar-sealed before moving to Turangi.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. I see the Honourable Member, Tama Tuavera.

MR T. TUAVERA: Mr Speaker, I stand to seek an extension of speaking time for the Honourable Member, as I am enjoying listening to his speech. Therefore, I move a Motion:

That the speaking time for the Honourable Member, Vaitoti tupa, be extended

MR SPEAKER: Can I call for a Seconder please?

Secinded by the Honourable Member, Tingika Elikana

The Question is:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

I will ask the Honourable Member to speak for only 10 minutes.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Mr Speaker. I would like to thank my colleague the Member of Parliament for Ngatangiia for moving a Motion in granting me an extension time of 10 minutes. I would also like to thank the Member of Parliament for Pukapuka for supporting this the Motion.

Continuing on about the Projects of the Cook Islands because I wanted to inform the Member for Pukapuka/Nassau that one of the project in this list of projects, is the Harbour Project for Nassau. This is why he supported the Motion that was placed before the House because he knows that I will be talking about the project for Nassau. Even with the Member of Parliament for Manihiki, there is also a project for Manihiki, the Airport Project. One other item I would like to bring to your attention is IT. This is another item that the Prime Minister had stated, the upgrade of the IT system in the Outer Islands, from Tongareva all the way down to Mangaia. This is important to our nation because our people from the Outer Islands are finding it difficult to listen to our Parliament Sitting, with the exemption of some islands.

This includes the funding support that is provided to help support these projects. The Honourable Member for RAPPA have touched base on Waste Management. We are well aware that this is one of the biggest issue here in Rarotonga. As we have heard, he has confirmed that there is funding available to help mitigate our waste management problem. I know that in the near future, this problem will develop in the Outer Islands, especially in the Southern Group Islands. Therefore, this would be a great step for us to take in preparing ourselves in case it develops in the Southern Group Islands, we will be ready to tackle the issue when it arises. This is the purpose of these fundings from overseas, to help us. There are other areas as well that requires attention in terms of advancements.

I have also reviewed our processes about the installation of our Solar panels, which the Prime Minister did not mention. Today, the solar stations in the Outer Islands have been completely installed. The problem is, where is the allocation for the maintenance of these solar stations? I believe though that whoever stands in Government after the General Election, we will find out. Maybe we the Opposition will become Government, but we do not know. We need some funding to maintain these solar stations.

I would like to move another part of the Budget, ERR, the Economic Recovery Roadmap. In the ERR, the Prime Minister stated that there is an allocation of funds that will help support our Private sector. This fund is huge Mr Speaker, and it is enough to help our Private sectors. I would say Mr Speaker, that there is about \$40 that can be used to help the Private sectors. The Private sectors would be relieved to know that there is an allocation with the Government that can help support them. But I would like to request the Private sectors, with business owners, to also put some funding aside as a backup plan to help support your businesses because we do not know how this pandemic maneuvers. I believe the Prime Minister will be pleased if he discovers that the Private sectors will start on this initiative of putting aside savings for the future support of their businesses.

Mr Speaker, I would like to talk about the completed projects and the outstanding projects. I will not cover every individual project, I just wanted to share that some of the projects have been completed that were sourced from the past Budget to today's Budget. We need to finish the rest of the outstanding projects.

In relations to ERR, one of the requirements for this year's Budget is to determine how we can reduce our debt and if we could review the different allocations that is being appropriated to the different departments. We need to have a look at the appropriation for Infrastructure. We also need to find a way how to address the problem of migration because we discussed about this issue since 2020 till now.

Mr Speaker, I believe that this is an important issue that needs to be looked at for the beneficial of our country. Mr Speaker, I know that a number of people have left the islands of Atiu, Mauke and Mitiaro and we should at how we can help these people migrating overseas to remain here in the Cook Islands. But we cannot do anything for they have left to seek support from overseas.

Mr Speaker, I can see that my time is up. I would like to thank the Prime Minister for what he had reported to this Honourable House about the pros and cons. We need to work together how to strengthen the cons side. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. Seeing that there are no Members who would like to speak, I will call upon the Minister Responsible.

Anyways I can see the Honourable Member Tamaiva Tuavera, I have to deduct a couple of your minutes because the other Member has used it. You may continue Honourable Member.

MR T. TUAVERA: Thank you Mr Speaker. I rise to speak on the Merits of the Budget, also known as, the Budget of Keeping the Faith. When I look at this Budget, it is almost identical to last year's Budget. I think there is a different of about \$42 million less. I have not much to say on this appropriation from the Prime Minister because when I look at the allocations I think it is fair. However, I do believe when we return later to look at the details of the Budget then maybe I will have some more to say on this.

Firstly, I would like to talk on Fiscal Outlook because I do not like this increase on the Debt Ratio because that is the percent of the GDP that we can borrow. Mr Speaker, it is a huge amount if 65 percent is the limit that we aim for because that gives us a buffer of \$147 million and if we were to go over that, we will be on the road of no return. We need to be careful on how we go from here if we are to commit to the 65 percent GDP. The Prime Minister has alluded earlier to being the Minister of Finance for the last 12 years, but has the Prime Minister learnt a lesson because what we have all learned here is for us not to put all your eggs into one basket. I have not seen anything in here that says we are going to diversify. All I see in here is tourism, tourism and more tourism, unless we are going to be talking about the deep sea mining because that is probably the only way that he is hoping to get money to bring us out of this big hole that we are about to dig.

By my calculation Mr Speaker, each one of us from old to young babies will owe \$22 thousand each to repay the debt. That is each person in the Cook Islands and that is a big fix and a huge request.

I move on to the Digital Infrastructure of the Cook Islands. I think in the Appropriation, \$300 thousand was allocated to improve and to upgrade our IT network here in Rarotonga and in the Outer Islands. This is to make it reliable and to improve the connectivity and the facilities in the

Outer Islands. If I can turn the clock back to 2018 back at Crown Beach because at that time, communications in the Outer Islands was very poor and bad. We even had an expert that virtually linked with us through Zoom from the UK who gave us a quick lesson on how to improve our communications to the Outer Islands. Then the DPM, Mr Mark Brown at the time made a comment that he will put \$500 thousand aside for improving the communication line with the Outer Islands. Fast forward to today, I have not seen any improvement. If anyone have, please tell me because when you go to the Outer Islands, you will have to find a spot and once your phone connects, you stop there and then use your phone. That, Mr Speaker is what was given to us by the then, DPM.

We will now move on to the Physical Infrastructure of Water and Sanitation. I must say that there has been a big improvement in the water being supplied to our houses and also our water stations. Some of these stations were put up by some of our individual MPs from each villages and I was hoping that the Government would reimburse all these MPs for the amount of money they have spent to put these water stations up for them to talk about when they are present. I will not go back Mr Speaker...

HON. G. ANGENE: Point of Order.

MR SPEAKER: What is your Point of Order, Honourable Member?

HON. G. ANGENE: On the comment from the Honourable Member of Ngatangiia, to reimburse the funds to the Members of Parliament for installing these water stations. I believe the work you do for your Constituency should be done out of love. I have built water stations in my Constituency and I have never asked for reimbursement.

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I have to interrupt you. It is now time for recess and Honourable Member Tamaiva Tuavera, you may continue when Parliament resumes.

Sitting suspended at 11.28 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 12.00 p.m.

MR SPEAKER: All be seated. Before we suspended Parliament, the Honourable Member Tamaiva Tuavera was on the Floor; you may continue Honourable Member.

MR T. TUAVERA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was talking about the water stations around the island. I would like to point out to the Minister for the Point of Order, thank you to Honourable Minister, but it was a comment that was made. I was praising the water supplier, To Tatou Vai because of the report that we receive on a monthly basis about how they always praise these water stations. It does provide clean drinking water for our people though.

I would like to come back to NCD. As mentioned in the Statement, there was an NCD Strategic Action Plan released last year and I have a little problem about that. I think, the Ministry of Health would need to strengthen this area with our health care because since then, we have encountered an increase in over-weight rising up to 89.5 percent and with obesity with a rise of up to 69.8

percent. This is not a very statistic record for our small nation. We can talk about what we eat and the diets we are on till the horses come home and I can guarantee you today that this is not working. I think the Minister of Health can nail this one with her team.

With the Ministry of Health, since I spoke about the dental clinic issue with their equipment, I am sure that the Honourable Minister Rose Toki-Brown will task some of her staff to look into it, especially after seeing some of the photos from the Clinic itself.

I would like to share my experience when I was hospitalised due to COVID. There is a room up at the Hospital and it is called the Isolation Room and is quite identical to a prison cell. There is a big window and there is also a door. Once you enter the room, the doors will be locked from the outside. It was unfortunate that after two hours of being tested positive to COVID, I had a kidney stone. I had to isolate myself at home and I had to call the ambulance who came to pick me up. I went up the Hospital four times and was discharged once the pain dissipated. This occurred over a three day period and on the third day, I was placed under quarantine in this Isolation Room.

Mr Speaker, when you are in pain and I mean in pain and there is a machine next to you that sounds like a generator, it is very unhealthy because for 24 hours, that is all you hear, this machine. I was told the machine was to purify the air before the air is released out. The noises that the machine was making, it was very unhealthy and I actually thought that I was losing my mind. I ended up threatening the nurses in forcing the door down with the bed from inside the room if he did not unlock the door. In doing so, the nurse obeyed my threat and unlocked the door. By unlocking the door, I stuck my head out and immediately, I was at peace. I would not know the outcome to someone who is smaller than I. I tried to locate my happy place but I could not find it.

With that room, Honourable Minister, I think you should all go in there and spend at least one night and see how you would feel being locked away in that room. Do not take any morphine, painkiller, just go and spend 24 hours in there. I urge that you look into this, it is very unhealthy.

On that note, Mr Speaker, I will speak on the Financial Statement and also the link to our Budget. As mentioned before, I could pick up Book 2 from last year and it is exactly the same as the current one. We have talked about this Budget last year and today's book, I do not know why it took so long to be printed. I am happy though that all the bases are covered in the Budget this year, be it \$42 million short or thereabouts and the Minister of Finance have explained the reason why the Budget is different by that number. With that, I will support the Budget that is presented to us and will wait until we debate on the Bill. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. Seeing that you are a former Army personnel, I am sure you have overcome the uncomfortable in an Isolation Room quite similar to this one. Now, I see the Honourable Minister Rose Toki-Brown; you have the Floor.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Thank you Mr Speaker. From last Sunday, the Bible said from Psalms 47:1, "*Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy*". The Chaplain on that day also mentioned that it is right that we the people of the Cook Islands should celebrate and clap our hands. What else can we do but clap our hands and give thanks to our God, for He has granted us the strength, knowledge and the understanding to us the people of the Cook Islands, the

government, the Prime Minister of the country, Cabinet Ministers, the three Pillars of our country, the Churches and all the different Denominations.

Our traditional leaders from the president, Kaumaiti and all the traditional leaders. All the different sectors of our country and all our workers in particular the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance. These are important sectors that played an important role throughout the pandemic.

I would also like to offer my acknowledgement and thanks to all of us and all of our families. As the Prime Minister mentioned in his Statement for our Budget this was not possible by one person or individually however, it is through cooperation, working together that we are able to open our borders and see the recovery that we see today.

I also believe Mr Speaker there remains our Outer Islands who are now going through the pandemic. However, we still see today the high level of our country through out the pacific in fact indeed this whole world. Therefore, I don't think it is appropriate for us to look at the little points to nick-pick the sections in this appropriation. Because we did not see any reductions in the funds for our old age pensioners and child welfare and also the workers of government. As well as the support to our private sectors for their businesses.

I do not complain about the comments offered by our Opposition side but I am surprised at our Member from Ngatangia because this Member everytime he has issues with the health services. So, I was really surprise when he raised this because he did not call me. However, he has mentioned this throughout the media. Nevermind, I shall look deeper into this issue raised by our Honourable Member.

And there we are Mr Speaker our Budget appropriation and I give thanks for this Budget. To the officials of the Ministry of Finance because they are the ones that worked very hard alongside their Minister in looking at our situation this coming year and how are we going to come out of this situation. Today we see this and we praise God for this as our country is again moving and progressing forward. There is no impact on the supporting funds to our workers and departments so they continue to carry out their responsibilities.

I come back to our Health Services. I will focus on giving thanks, I think we should always give thanks for the hard work they do so when they hear this they are encouraged to carry on their good works. I always say this to my Ministry and staff who work hard. You are the ones carrying out the hard work everyday in supporting the livelihood of our people. I would like to give special thanks to the Secretary of the Ministry of Health as I am proud of the good work that he carried out to bring us to this status today.

Regardless of all the blames and the complaints placed upon him but we see the good situation we are in today. And to all the supporting staff, the managers below his leadership, all the doctors and nurses and all the workers in the Ministry of Health. All the supporting staff and volunteers. It is their hard work to achieve the success we see today.

I would also like to refer back to the Outer Islands and the three pillars of our community in the Outer Islands. Mr Speaker I would like to start first with our island of Atiu in giving thanks to the

three sectors of the island. Especially the spirit of cooperation through out this time because Atiu is one of the first island following Aitutaki to put their hand up to opening their borders.

So, today the rate of infection of covid has fallen on the island of Atiu. Nobody has been admitted to hospital. The people are happy they are nearing the time where the restrictions will be removed on the island. Also this is the case for the remaining islands of Nga-Pu-Toru as well as the island of Mangaia. As well as our people on the islands of the North.

Therefore, Mr Speaker and our people listening in this is the appropriation, for the past year and this new appropriation. That will serve to carry us for one year. To help improve and strengthen all the work in all the different sectors in our country. Because all of us on this side of the House we do not boast and talk too much or talk before the bread is baked. So, I will not go through all the little details of this Budget but however, we should look and see in the future all the works that will take place.

It is true as the Members has talked about the NCD situation. I assure you that his work is being carried with the Ministry of Health today. To al of our people if we really consider the situation that we have come through in the last year. I do not think we should create any ideas, consider the Scripture which says, *“Clap your hands all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy”*. What else do we want because we see all the help, support and blessings on Rarotonga as well as the Outer Islands. This is often something that we talk about, not only Rarotonga but the whole islands of the Cook Islands.

So, I am very happy to give my full support to this appropriation before us. Because we are all working together to support and assist all the differect sector that needs support. Even though maybe it will not be achieved quickly but however, it will be through the work of next year that we will achieve.

Therefore, my thanks to the Prime Minister of this country, his deputy, and all the ministers and all of us. To all the Members of Parliament as well as those in the Opposition and all our families. I would like join to the ranks our families and people. That we all held hands together in unity throughout this period that we have come through. My request today is that we all continue to hold hands throughout the rest of this year that we will be going through.

As this is a very important period for us especially in Atiu, Nga-Pu-Toru and Rarotonga. When we celebrate the 200 years of the arrival of the Gospel to these islands. The Government has not ignored this very important part of our lives.

As we all embrace this opportunity just like Aitutaki did in accepting the Gospel to our country. I would also like to acknowledge those responsible in keeping our town area clean, especially the Member of Parliament for Tupapa/Maraerenga because they are always out every morning cleaning our town while we are still in bed sleeping. Thank you to you all and your Director, Henry Tupa and the Ministry of Internal Affairs for your good work. I am also pleased to inform you all today, the Ministry of Internal Affairs have asked to have their truck replaced, therefore, let me inform you that your wish has been granted and a truck will be on its way.

Mr Speaker, this is enough. However, I would like to mention the good work being carried out on Mauke and throughout the Cook Islands for the benefit of our people. God bless and I have a supporting Verse on the theme for the Budget by the Prime Minister. It says *“I cast my eyes upon the hills, and I receive the help then, I receive help from my God for he created the heavens and the earth”*. God bless.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. Now I see the Honourable Member Nooroa Baker; you have the Floor.

MR N. BAKER: Thank you Mr Speaker. Firstly, if I can be given the opportunity to greet my constituency. I give my greetings and my regards to the people of Akaoa. To the three Denominations in our area of Akaoa. To our Queen, Tinomona Ariki and all your supporters in our village according to the works that you are doing. Also, I greet all the business people in Puaikura, may our God richly bless as you run your businesses above all our people.

Coming back to the Appropriation, I have heard the Ministerial Statement from the Prime Minister yesterday telling us in details that the Minimum Wage has been raised from \$8 to \$8.50. This is good news for our people, but when I look at this very closely and especially with the increase of \$8.50, when you compare it with the things that we are buying, I would say there is no balance in between. I have workers and I pay them over \$11 an hour. When I look at that payment, it is not enough for that household. I have explained to them that if I have to increase it over \$11, I will have to increase my charges and that will be a burden on all of us. Maybe it is appropriated for the Prime Minister to consider from the government side how we can balance all these things according to the cost of living that we pay in the shops. I am not complaining about this increase but it needs to be considered again.

I would also like to thank the Government for the development of To Tatou Vai and I see that we have clean water. For a long period of time, we have been suffering with dirty water and quite recently, we discovered how clean our water is. But we need to consider how we are going to repay for the money expended to improve water. Our people need to understand that we have come through pandemic. Therefore, there is not enough money generated to help our debts. So, our people need to know that we have to pay for water. I do not know what the charges are but I think it is a good reason to consider contributing something to pay for the loan to improve our water. I think it is about time for us to pay water because when I drive around the island, I see a lot of water wastage. So, that is what I am asking our people to consider very carefully how we can generate the economy in our country to help us pay for our debt.

Maybe we will generate some money for our government to help with the health of our people because I have been told that from last Sunday, a 3-year-old boy from Aitutaki had passed away and had pneumonia. I have had pneumonia where I went up the hospital and was told that it was just a flu. I went home and the following day, I was unwell and I had to go back to the Hospital. Again, I was told that I had the flu. When I went to see Doctor Uka, he discovered that I had pneumonia. I do not blame the doctors up the Hospital but there is a need to look at the area which is quite weak. We do not have enough Doctors up the Hospital.

When we look at Doctor Deacon, he is the only Surgeon available and yes, I know that he is a son from Pukapuka. I know that he had overworked because of the shift he is on which is 24/7 on-

call. So, I know for sure that if only the Government can look for another Doctor, preferably a Surgeon, to help out with Doctor Deacon in the work that he does.

Two weeks ago, I had a friend over, who is a Doctor from the United States. I met with Bob Williams from the Ministry of Health, together with this Doctor. This Doctor wanted to come and help out with our situation after explaining our situation to him. He is available to come and help us. He was trained from the United States and I know we have left this in the hands of the Secretary of Health.

Listening to our Budget and the expenses, I sympathise my people of Puaikura. For so many years, I have asked several times if our road can be improved. ICI came and took some photos and left and still, they have not returned. As mentioned by the Honourable Member for Ruaau, there are eggs hatching in Puaikura because we know the resorts that are based in Puaikura, hence his reference of money generated out of eggs.

We know that there is a General Election around the corner and I am not sure whether the roads of Puaikura will be worked on. But do not worry, once the Democratic comes into power, we will start on it straight away.

I would like to thank the Honourable Minister George Angene for always helping me out every time I ask him for help. Maybe when he becomes our Prime Minister, it will be easier for me to ask him for help. Therefore, I thank you for everything you have done for Akaoa.

In terms of our Appropriation, I can see that there is not much amendment to the Budget compared to the past Budgets. Therefore, I give my support for this Budget. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member, Nooroa Baker. I now see the Honourable Minister Patrick Arioka; you have the Floor.

HON. P. ARIOKA: Thank you Mr Speaker and Kia Orana to all of us in the Name of our Lord. Kia Orana to all our people listening in from the North and Southern Group, as well as our people watching us on livestream Facebook from New Zealand and Australia, Kia Orana to you all. Mr Speaker, staff of Parliament and our Interpreters, good morning to you all. Kia Orana to every individual Members of Parliament, Kia Orana to you all. To everyone who is present in this Honourable House, who is here for this special Sitting, in the Name of our Lord, I greet you all on this very beautiful day.

Mr Speaker, if I can be allowed to greet the people of my Constituency. Firstly, to Tinomana Ariki, traditional Leaders, Kia Orana to you all. The different Denominations in our village, Kia Orana to you all. To the different suburbs from Ruaau, Akaoa and Murienua, Kia Orana to you all.

Kia Orana to my colleagues who is here to represent Ruaau and Akaoa, Kia Orana to you two.

Mr Speaker, I would like to unify all of us together in recognising the work that we have done for our people since the beginning. Even with some deficiencies in some of the areas of our work, I

believe that the unity that we have in working together to accomplish some of those tasks, it is completed. Let us not forget the struggle we went through with COVID in which we have managed to defeat this virus. Therefore Mr Speaker, on behalf of the three of us, I would like to convey our thanks to all our traditional Leaders and Churches for their wonderful work and for their encouragement. Our aim is for us three to continue working together, not for ourselves individually, but for the benefit of all our people. As some of us are used with working on our own to benefit ourselves, we need to put that aside and concentrate in working together for the benefit of our people, in terms of unity.

A unity that is very much critical at this time particularly when we come to this Budget Appropriation that has been presented for this Honourable House.

I congratulate the Prime Minister for the wonderful speech yesterday and had all the ingredients that is necessary to make the right strike to deal with real matters that matters to our lives individually and also to the household of our people and therefore congratulations also to Garth Henderson and his team at MFEM for putting together a well balanced Budget but more importantly critical rules that we need to abide by in ensuring that we have a sustainable Budget throughout the years to come.

I think the three Speakers earlier on, the Honourable Member for Matavera and the Honourable Member for Ngatangiia, they have missed the point on their argument on the fiscal responsibility of this government. This is to do with the three keys areas that we need to realise in this Honourable House and I am so impressed with the quote of this Budget, which focuses in *Keeping the Faith*. Mr Speaker, there is a reason for that and that is because, we do not look at the Budget for being balanced and the purpose of the Budget, but rather a responsible Budget to ensure that it saves us from being looped into trouble especially with what we have come through. It is so easy for the two Members concerned for mistakenly highlighting invalid percentage ratios for different aspects of the Budget.

Mr Speaker, this Government ensures that we remain below the 50 percent mark. We have retained our debt ratio to remain at 32 percent. If I have to emphasize to the two Members of Parliament, they can refer to page 16 of Book 1, they will note in that particular page the Net Debt and Investment Rule that the Government and MFEM has presented to this Honourable House and that we should not exceed a cap of 55 percent, even to exceed a hard cap of 65 percent of GDP.

Mr Speaker, we need to be mindful when quoting these figures, we need to keep an open mind of how, where and when to apply them because the hard work of the many people that had worked on it will be wasted.

Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister took us back to three years with our three COVID cases in 2020 to getting our country back into action in 2021. As we went through that whole preparation, Mr Speaker, from mid 2021 to this year, we were going through some tough times. Mr Speaker, I do not believe that we are short memory at this moment to not realise how our individual lives are disrupted. Business struggled a lot and they have begged the Government to ensure that we had their support so they could continue with their businesses.

Mr Speaker, there are two aspects that I can see quite clearly in this Budget. The first and foremost as the Honourable Member had mentioned, “tourism, tourism, tourism”. He had forgotten though how much tourism had impacted the people that are selling coconuts on the side of the road. Therefore Mr Speaker, I am concerned because it seems like as if we are here making things up without realising the importance of tourism. Mr Speaker, tourism is an industry that will speed our recovery and hopefully, in the next two years, everything will be as it used to be. No doubt, the Government will support diversification in the near future, as it will help boost the economy and this is where we would need our country to put their faith in, so that we may be able to generate capitals and hope for everything to be back to normal.

The second aspect of this Budget Mr Speaker is the impact on inflation. As we know, with the impact that this pandemic have caused worldwide and now, we have the war that is in Ukraine, this has caused a major impact to the demand and supply of products to our country.

It is also fair to say Mr Speaker that this Budget have also been prepared to tackle some unexpected disaster that we may encounter and we hope that this will not eventuate in this financial year. Its purpose will reduce the burden that it may cause our people and the Outer Islands from the inflation costs that we currently have.

Mr Speaker, this Government will look for new opportunities to take us up and to help us deal with impacts of inflation. In concluding Mr Speaker, I want to share a famous quote, “*ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.*”

I believe that the theme for our Budget, ‘Keeping the Faith’, fits our purpose as leaders of this country, which will allow us to reunite our people, to work hard in reviving our country back to its normal state for the years to come. Thank you very much.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister, Patrick Arioka. I see the Honourable Minister, George Angene; you have the Floor.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Mr Speaker. I stand before this House to give my thoughts on the appropriation before the House. But before I do so, may I seek permission from the Chair for me to address my Constituency. Also, because you have given me 20 minutes, I believe there will be 10 minutes for me and 10 minutes for the Interpreter. So, if we go accordingly to 20 minutes of my speaking time, I should be granted with 40 minutes in total. That is a matter for you to think about and decide for our future Meetings.

To my Constituency of Tupapa Tapere-O-Au, Kia Orana and thank you to you all. To our Chief, Vakatini Ariki, your traditional supporters, greetings to you. To the seven traditional Leaders and the additional Leaders of three, which brings it to a total of 10, greetings to you all. I would also like to acknowledge our newly appointed Teava Mataiapo, greetings to you. I was not there to witness your investiture, however, I know that you have accepted my gifts for the occasion of your investiture, congratulations and thank you. To our young sports members in my Constituency, greetings to you all.

To my right hand man, the President of our sports association, Tupapa Sports Association, Mr Tere Strickland, Kia Orana to you. My other right hand man, Maru Isaiah for your leading part in the rugby league and union, greetings to you. To all my young people in my Constituency who supports me and wants me to remain in Parliament, greetings and thank you to you all. To the President of our Netball Club, Marama Anguna and your team, greetings to you all. You have witnessed all the good work that we have done within our Constituency, I will leave that to you for consideration for the upcoming days.

To our disabled and destitute, Kia Orana to you all. Our elderly pensioners who have been collecting the Old Age Pension since 1965, Kia Orana to you all. To all our children who are collecting the Child Benefits, I used to collect the Child Benefit back in the days, however, I am now collecting the Old Age Pension. Thank you Honourable Prime Minister for supporting us Pensioners and those within this Honourable House who have reached the age of 60, you did not reduce our pensions, however, you increased it. Therefore, thank you so much.

Mr Speaker, this Government have supported us with so many things and have blessed our people in so many ways. To inform you all, I am the type of person who will easily object to anything that I do not support. I have objected to many things when I first entered this House, today I am supporting whatever comes. I want the Opposition to know and to understand that there are things the Government can provide and things that the Government cannot provide. This is similar to a light switch when we switch a light on, it will come on, and then when we switch it off, it will go off.

When you ask for something, sometimes you will not get it straight away. But I will ask that you patiently wait because there are moments for everything. This can be found in Ecclesiastes 3:1. If you still cannot find it, then I would suggest that you look into John 5:39, which says, "*Study the Scriptures...*"

Our aim is for us to live in peace and for us to be surrounded by the eternal love of our Lord Jesus. We must stop judging, mocking and be of jealousy. We must learn how "*seek peace and pursue it*". I am not here as a Pastor, but I am like a farmer who goes out to sow with what I have learnt from the word of God. The Bible said, "*...that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth...*" I know that I am a sinner and I have committed a lot of crimes in this world.

Today, God have found me to be a father to those who have been prosecuted and for me to guide them. Philipines 3:12 states, "*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that...*"

Therefore Mr Speaker, these are some of the things that I would like to strive for in my life. I hear these terminologies being spoken, 'Faith, Hope and Love'. What we can see today with these words that I am hearing, I have chosen the following words, 'Judging, Mocking and Jealousy'. I will say that these groups of words do not align with each other in peace. If you claim to pose the following words onto George Maggie, 'Faith, Hope and Love', I tell you that what you are saying will not work. The purpose of my life is to live in peace. I have lived a life of sin and unrighteousness and my life never improved.

On 18 June 1992, I accepted our Lord Jesus Christ. *“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love”*.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, as I have said, let us all live in peace. *“Be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise but as wise”*, and be prepared for the worse.

I was listening to my colleague, the Honourable Nooroa Baker, stating that I can be the Prime Minister. My friend, I would refuse to become the Prime Minister as our allocation would be the first be used and we will all go home without pay.

I wanted to inform everyone in this Honourable House that I fully support our Prime Minister with his Appropriation Bill for this year 2022. I believe that we are all aware that the Prime Minister and I are related and I will not let anything to cause any problems between us and our Party.

Mr Speaker, I give my 100% support for our Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and for the Government of today in leading our country. Therefore, I give my full support for the purpose of the Appropriation Bill.

Mr Speaker, this could be my last time before the House, I, the Honourable Member of Parliament for Tupapa would like to convey my regards to you all, Honourable Members, I love you all, Amen.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister, George Angene. I am understand that you and the Prime Minister are related to the Honourable Member Tamaiva Tuavera. I see the Honourable Minister Vaine Mokoroa; you have the Floor.

HON. V. MOKOROA: Thank you Mr Speaker and good afternoon to all of us in this Honourable House. I rise to commend and give my support to the Appropriation Bill tabled before us today. At the outset let me commend and congratulate the Prime Minister as well as to the Financial Secretary Garth Henderson and all his Budget staff at MFEM for putting together a document that I believe is one of the most complicated and one of the worst time that we have come through. Mr Speaker, we have seen two years of harm that the COVID has affected our country.

This is unprecedented and I think our generation today would note that this is one of the worst pandemic to hit us. For many countries, they are burying their families, their brothers, their sisters, their parents as the result of COVID. We should thank the good Lord who have looked after us very well in the two years we have come through during the COVID process. The period that we have come through was one of the best thing our Prime Minister has led us through. I suppose the best is not the right word but I would say most challenging and the outcome we see today has been widely praised regularly and globally.

Mr Speaker, I would like to take this time to thank the Minister of Health, the Honourable Minister Rose Toki-Brown, together with the Head of Ministry, Mr Bob Williams and the staff of MOH who have been working hard in the past two years. The past two years has tested the ability, the strength and the power of the staff of MOH and to this day, they continue to carry out the good work that they are doing during COVID here in Rarotonga and the Outer Islands.

For us here in Rarotonga, I would like thank all the Punas that have worked hard to assist MOH, all the volunteers and all Public Servants who have the Punas in the past two years.

On behalf of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health, let me pass on our deepest thanks for the effort and time and the dedication that you have put through, to assist Te Marae Ora to handle COVID-19 through the past two years. Not forgetting all the Members of Parliament that is present in this House, your participation and your active role in supporting Te Marae Ora in combating COVID in your own particular Puna.

The economic impact of COVID in the Cook Islands and in the countries surrounding us, I am not sure how other countries are preparing their Budget to combat COVID-19 and to recover economically.

Mr Speaker, before us is a document that has been put together by the Ministry of Finance and the Heads of Ministries to present to us for the next 12 months. I noted that the Honourable Member Tamaiva Tuavera and Honourable Member Nooroa Baker both stated that this is the same Budget as the last year when in reality and in practicality the Budget should have been slashed by several percent. Public servants should have been sent home because of the unavailability of funding to pay for our public servants. Members of Parliament should have been sacked and sent home because of the unavailability of funding but we should thank the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister because the Budget of this year have not been slashed. We have retained all of our public servants.

Within Budget Book 1, Page 78 spells out some of the significant expenditure initiatives that this Government will be appropriating. In the time of economical impact we are able to increase the minimum wage. In the time of economic impact we are able to increase our welfare payment for our elderly. In the time of economic impact we are able to spend 1.34 million to remunerate our teachers over the next four years. At the same time we would like to improve connectivity between Rarotonga and the Outer Islands and throughout the world in terms of improving our telecommunications.

This Budget is based on the theme of ‘Keeping the Faith’ and as the Minister Rose and the Minister Maggie had stated, it is serve our people we all need to be working together to build our Nation that we are able to come out of this economic crisis. On those few words, I support the Budget wholeheartedly. Thank you very much.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. I now see the Honourable Member Terepai Maoate; you have the Floor.

MR T. MAOATE: Thank you Mr Speaker and greetings to you and your staff who is carrying out their duties in this Honourable House, greetings to you all. To our people listening in over the radio, from within the Cook Islands and those overseas, greetings to you all.

Mr Speaker, may I have a short time to address my people of Amuri/Ureia? To the different Denominations, especially our Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Free Church within our

village, greetings to you all. To the Island Council Members, Chairman and both villages, greetings in the Name of our Lord. To our people of Amuri/Ureia especially those who supported us during the time of COVID, greetings to you all. Kia Orana to my committee members and Chairman, thank you for the work you do and may you continue strive for our community. To the people of Aitutaki, Island Council Members, EO and your staff, greetings to you all. Traditional Leaders, the different Denominations on the island of Aitutaki and the people of Aitutaki, greetings to you all.

I wanted to thank you all for what you have done during COVID until today. We have worked together peacefully and I ask that we continue our peaceful relationship, especially with the upcoming General Election.

I now would like to share my thoughts on the Appropriation Bill 2022. As stated by the Honourable Prime Minister, this is a Budget of “Faith”. In my own interpretation, it is a Strong Faith. I wanted to inform everybody that this “Faith” in discussion have had my faith for this Government from last year. For example, we were given the time to review the Book when it was distributed. Today, we have been given this Book and is expected to be done by the end of the week. This is not a good start for the term ‘Faith’; it seems that we had problems with the commencement of this Budget. However, I wanted to thank the Government for their outstanding work during COVID. To the Minister of Health and your staff, the work you did here in Rarotonga and over in the Outer Islands, thank you for your good work. Thank you to the Government for the support that you have provided for the people with food parcels, support for the Private Sectors and the initiative that was implemented in helping our employees, retaining them here in the Cook Islands.

I also wanted to thank our major companies such as Land Holdings Ltd for the projects you have been tasked to do through Infrastructure investment because, our people had gone back to being paid at the Minimum Wage, however, some of the companies have managed to pay their staff at a considerate rate. I wanted to say that a lot of these companies wanted to partake in this and have asked the Government for help, which our Government have allocated some funding to help support these major companies. We were also able to save some money in the Bank for our needs in case we go through another catastrophic event. Last year, New Zealand provided us some support by giving us \$60 million.

I want to take us back to the pre-COVID period. When we closed our borders to international travellers, we planned to keep our borders closed for about three to six months. Instead, it went for 18 months. We know that the money used for paying our employees was loaned from the bank. This is why I said that the title ‘Faith’ do not fit the purpose of what was planned and the prediction that was set by the Government for the borders to close for three to six months, for it has eventually exceeded for two years. ‘Faith’ is not the right term to describe this Budget.

I wanted to share the purpose of this Appropriation. In Personnel for 2021/22 under the Expenditure, \$67.7 million was expended on employees. For this financial year 2022/23, it was estimated that \$69.7 million was used, with an increase difference of \$7.2 million compared to last year’s Budget. I understand that this is to accommodate some of the labour force for the Ministry of Health. But my question would be based on the fairness, for example, for Governance Officers

in the Outer Islands, they get paid \$35 thousand per annum. I am not sure whether the number of people have increased in the Outer Islands, for I have not checked our Census. I can see the shortage of staff in the Outer Islands, for Aitutaki, we do not have a qualified Dentist. A lot of our elderly people are wanting to have their dentals checked, even our Dentist, Dr. Alfronze, he came over to do his part but was only there for a short period of time.

There are other things that needs to be looked at, such as Island Council Members, I believe it is time for their salary to be raised as they are currently sitting on \$4,000 per annum. We will just wait and see when the Government will implement the increase of our Minimum Wage from \$8 to \$8.50 per hour.

As stated by the Member for Akaoa, people are finding it difficult to afford anything from the shops with the current Minimum Wage. Our Minimum Wage should be set at \$10 an hour. I know that businesses are paying their employees from \$11 to \$15 per hour. But we will need to look at this carefully because for some of the businesses, some may struggle, as it all depends on the revenue generated. In the Outer Islands, especially Aitutaki, we have always wanted to retain our people on the island, we tried to increase our pay rates and I can confirm that the pay rates in Aitutaki is much higher than here in Rarotonga. This is one of the Policy for the Democratic Party, increasing the Minimum Wage, therefore, this would be something to consider for your votes.

Payroll for us Members of Parliament, the Honourable Minister have said that if he becomes the Prime Minister, he will slice our pay. I want to give you the Prime Minister portfolio when the upcoming Election is over. We need to think about our people who are struggling in their homes. We are probably on a payroll that requires a cut of 20 to 30 percent. The Democratic Party is ready for this caucus, even with employees whose pay is above \$60 to \$70 thousand, to consider sharing their pay for our vulnerables.

Let us talk about the debt that we owe today. We have debts with no money in the bank. We owe \$208 million. If we were to be raided with another catastrophe, we will not have any money to strive through it, even if a cyclone strikes us. Our job is to prepare ourselves for such event so that we do not enter into debts again.

Reading this Appropriation, it says that we can borrow an extra \$85 million on top of what we have in debt. I cannot see any plans in place that will help with the payment of our debt and spending, it is as if we have no debts at all.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member.

MR W. HEATHER: Mr Speaker, I stand to seek permission and to move a Motion:

That an extension of speaking time be given to the Honourable Member Terepai Maoate

MR SPEAKER: Can I call for a Seconder?

Seconded by the Honourable Member, Selina Napa

The Question is:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Terepai Maote, you may continue.

MR T. MAOATE: Thank you Mr Speaker and those of us who granted me the extension especially those of you from the government side as I look deeper into the Budget of 'Faith'. As I have said, I do know our Government is looking for possibilities to assist our people. However, I do feel that we should put a plan together and what we should do in the future.

I am not sure whether you have seen on the News, maybe some of you have, it seems that the pattern of cyclones have changed and is not like how it was before where cyclones will hit in 5 or sometimes 20 years. This is happening every year and we are so fortunate that God has protected us throughout this time, apart from COVID. As mentioned by the Honourable Member of Ngatangiia, we need to seek assistance from elsewhere because we rely on tourists when something bad happens to our nation.

We do have supports for our people, especially for our vulnerable ones, our elderly with the Old Age Pension and the Destitute Allowances that is given to them by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. For that, I would like to thank the Government and the Minister of Internal Affairs

I have acknowledged enough for the Government, I would like to share with every one of the problem with our Avarua Cable. I recall when we were told about this Cable to connect Rarotonga and Aitutaki, there is no limit under the sky to the potential of what this can do to the people of Aitutaki and of Rarotonga. I have forgotten the year that came about and that is how long it has been.

I cannot recall any improvement but when I ring on my phone there is a robotic voice on the other end. A significant amount of fund has been invested in this area and yet there is no improvement in our services in the outer islands. My plea to the area of government that is handing this please do not waste out time and money.

I have often commented and asked questions of water especially for us in Aitutaki. Often in the past I have made request in this House to look at our water storage in the outer islands because our water is ground fed. Today, the water in Arenikau is still not running. Sometimes it reaches to two weeks without water.

There is a project progressing in Aitutaki regarding the dredging of the harbour. This is a good work that is being carried out but I am asking whether this is a priority or the water for the people. This is a work the government is carrying out not only for Aitutaki but the other islands as well. If you cannot do this, then we the Democratic will come in as Government and will complete the water work. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member and now I see the Honourable Tetangi Matapo; you have the Floor.

MRS. T. MATAPO: Thank you Mr Speaker. Greetings to you and greetings to all of us in this Honourable House this afternoon.

Mr Speaker if I may say greetings to my Constituency if they are listening by radio or watching by Facebook. The three Pillars that we commonly greet in our lives, the Churches, Land and Government. To Numangatini Ariki, the six Punas and all the people on the island.

I stand to give you my thoughts on the Appropriation before the House. The word of God says, *“Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy”*.

Mr Speaker, we should be happy for the things put before the House, although we came through some problems but today, we find there is still funding in our economy for the future. So, I give my thanks to all the Ministers because in this Appropriation and in the past, I have stood before the Ministers' doors and they showed mercy for our people through the Appropriation that we see today. Even there are some difficulties, we thank God for the strength and knowledge that these people were able to put together this allocation. I will not be talking about the whole Appropriation, but I will bring in some for us to consider. I would like to bring some points for me to stand before the House.

Firstly, I would like to speak on about the Ministry of Health because we all know that they have taken upon themselves the burden to bring our country through and we thank God for this and I stand to tell you, COVID has not arrived on Mangaia yet. Maybe I could be the one responsible for carrying it there and then get chased out. We would like to thank the Minister and all the staff of the Ministry of Health.

I would also like to thank our staff at the Ministry of Health in Mangaia and all the volunteers that had helped out because, before our borders opened, the Mangaia Ministry of Health and volunteers worked hard to what we think is appropriate for Mangaia. We have heard of the Punas here in Rarotonga and I do believe there were support given by the Government. Unlike us in Mangaia, we went out to find ways to support ourselves even with our volunteers in each Puna, we worked closely together with our traditional leaders and our Island Government who were there supporting our people through this pandemic.

I believe the Government had allocated some money in case someone is tested positive for COVID-19, but there are criterions to qualify for this support. To date, no one qualifies for this because no one has been infected. So, to the Minister of Health, maybe a slight change can be done to the clauses in the Policy where it can be amended to include Mangaia because looking at the Appropriation for your Ministry, I give my support.

Secondly, I would like to talk about the Ministry of Education. It is so good to hear that an allocation has been given to support our teachers. When I look at some of the teachers, some of them have reached the half way age of 100. This is good that we are looking at our teachers but

their ages have crossed the half point of 100 so we need to look for new teachers to take on the challenge and to grow in this role.

I can see the support being given to by the Government that is stated here in this Appropriation. So, this is good news for the committee of the school in Mangaia and I would also like to thank the School Committees for their strong support on this.

My third topic that I would like to touch base on is Telecommunications. It was also mentioned by the Member from Aitutaki. I am the type of person as called by Manganians, *koriri*, meaning, jealous. When this service was taken away, I am unsure whether Mangaia have sowed this service. Therefore Honourable Prime Minister, people have been complaining in the last two weeks about the telecommunication services in Mangaia. I can see that there is an appropriation designated for this area. My request to you Honourable Prime Minister, some people from overseas are wanting to return to Mangaia to live, but because of their employment, this could be a useful resource for Mangaia where their Office can be based there, especially the Manganian people within your Office. Even though these people work for you, but this is a great idea in increasing the Census of Mangaia.

This is a solution that I believe will bring our people back because our youth of today, for them to return back to Mangaia, they want a faster internet connection. I am just quoting what some have said from overseas, a Manganian wanting to come back. This is what our youth would like in order for them to return because as we know it, this is an IT generation. Therefore, to the Leaders of this country, these are important factors that I believe are important factors to be raised and I can see that the funding allocated for these types of work is still being included in this Budget Book. I also believe that this type of assistance will come through this because it has started with the Ministry of Health. A disc has been installed for the Ministry of Health. Therefore, this is needed for Mangaia, especially for the different villages. When we say for something to be installed for Oneroa, it is for Oneroa only because Tamarua and Ivirua are quite far.

So, when you say to people who are watching us on television from Mangaia, you are referring to people from Oneroa and not Mangaia. This is the reason why I want to encourage the Telecommunication services in the Outer Islands.

Mr Speaker, there are other items that can be discussed in reference to the Budget Book, but I think I will end my speech here in case the Ministers forget what I have said.

When I stood up to talk, I only greeted the Government side and I totally forgot about my side. Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Kia Orana to you today. I am not sure whether you are listening or not, but to everyone here today.

To conclude my speech, there goes a Manganian quote that is being engraved into a concrete, if you to go to Mangaia, you will find it at the School where it is engraved into the concrete. It says, "*A Maori can achieve anything, the Papaa can, but to do this, we must work, work, work*". Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. When you were greeting your Deputy Leader, I thought you were referring to the Member next to you.

Honourable Member, I will have to interrupt you as it is now time for our afternoon break. When we come back, you will be the first person to take the Floor.

Sitting is now suspended and will resume at 3.00 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 2.25 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.58 p.m.

MR SPEAKER: All be seated. When we suspended Parliament, the Honourable Member for Vaipaea/Vaipae/Tautu was going to speak. I will give you the Floor to speak.

MR M. KITAI: Thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, may I request for time to convey my greetings to my Constituency.

If you are listening over the radio, Kia Orana to you my family and the people of my Constituency. To all our Church Ministers and your wives, Kia Orana to you all. To our Island Council Members and your wives, Kia Orana to you all. To my Chief Manārangī, Kia Orana to you in the name of our Lord. To those who holds a title and to those who do not, Kia Orana to you all and may God blesses you all. To my wife, Kia Orana to you in the Name of our Lord.

Mr Speaker, I want to talk on the Appropriation. Looking at this Appropriation, I really like what the Prime Minister have said that this is the "*Budget of Faith*". To me, we should only believe in God and not humans. But having heard what the Prime Minister have said, never mind, that is his own interpretation. We will not blame him, we will honour him.

When I look at the Minimum Wage, it is \$8.50. The price of a corned beef is \$9 is more than the Minimum Wage. We cannot afford to buy a corned beef on that Minimum Wage of \$8.50 with that price of \$9. The prices of everything inside the shops have gone up. If only the Minimum Wage was raised at \$9, we can then afford a tin of corned beef. Hopefully, the Prime Minister will consider this sometimes this week before Parliament adjourns.

Mr Speaker, my next concern is the succession of lands. When I go to succeed my own land, I will have to pay \$250 for five sections. If I put in an application for one section, I will have to pay \$250. I do not understand how this works, it looks funny. Can the Minister for Justice look into this? A number of people have approached me for me to bring this issue to Parliament. Some people could not afford to pay for their application fee of \$250, especially if the application is for one section. We should consider reducing the fee for one section to \$50, which is more affordable for our people. This is just a thought that I wanted to raise.

I would now like to talk about the Ministry of Education. There is not enough teachers in the Ministry of Education. I know because my wife is a retired teacher and she has been asked if she could return to teach again. The children of today are very stubborn and hard. They are stubborn in many ways because they talk back to the teachers as if they are the teacher. I believe the Member from Tamarua will agree to what I am saying because she was a former teacher. With teachers

today, they are not allowed to discipline or to hit the children. In the past, teachers were able to, but only for disciplining the children. But we cannot do anything now for the law has been passed. Therefore, let us all obey the law. Teachers who hit their students are advised not to.

My next item is water, as mentioned by my colleague. I support their proposition. When the water system shuts in some parts of our village, it takes from one to two weeks for it to start again. Sometimes, Infrastructural Officials will deliver water to the homes of our people. The problem though is, the lifting of a 6,000 Litres tank onto the truck before it gets filled up. When the truck delivers the water, the driver will have to drive slowly to prevent water from spilling out. By the time the tank is delivered, the water level in the tank is at a half level. Therefore, I would like to request if we can get a water truck for the purpose of transporting water to our homes, an actual water truck where water will not spill if the driver speeds.

Mr Speaker, my last item that I would like to speak about refers to us, Members of Parliament in this Honourable House. If possible, for us all to work together. This is the only where we can progress. Trust in God, hold hands together and we will reach our goal.

Isaiah 40:31 says, *“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint”*.

Thank you Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member. Now, I see the Honourable Member from Are-Nikau; you have the Floor.

MR T. MAKI-KAVANA: Thank you Mr Speaker for giving this opportunity to speak in this Honourable House. Mr Speaker, to your staff, thank you for arranging a Youth Parliament programme in training our young ones to be effective Members of Parliament in the future.

I would like to greet all the Members of Parliament in this Honourable House and the Honourable Prime Minister for guiding us through the toughest times that we can see. As I can see that the two Members of Parliament from our island have stood up, I believe it is right that I stand as well to avoid public accusations for not representing them in this House, as we approach the General Election period.

Kia Orana to all our Aitutaki people listening in, watching us on livestream from all over the world. This is me, your son, Member of Parliament for Arutanga/Reureu/Nikaupara, Tereapii Maki Kavana. I would like to extend my greetings to the people of Constituency.

I know that my Arutanga/Reureu/Nikaupara people are watching me from all over the world. Thank you for honoring me as your Member of Parliament from 2018 until today. To the different title holders in our Constituency, those in higher roles down to our children, Kia Orana to you all in the Name of our Lord.

I stand to give my support to the Appropriation Bill that is presented to this House, namely the *‘Budget of Faith’*. The talented and skillful people that are responsible for putting this

Appropriation together, I believe they are a descendants of Abraham, a man of 'Faith'. This is his people and I therefore would like to thank them, the descendants of Abraham; thank you so much.

This is a very powerful term found in the Bible, which covers Love and Kindness. This is how strong the faith that this Government has, the faith they have in God and how faithful they are towards each other, working together to achieve the achievements of being here today. Therefore, Praise the Lord.

In Aitutaki today, I would like to acknowledge the work that is happening right now and the work that was there before. There is this project on the island of Aitutaki, contracted by the Oronga Centre, a project to upgrade our wharf as prescribed in our Budget Book. We have been given \$500 thousand in support of this project for this year. This project is near completion and the contractors are waiting for the release of this fund so that they may complete this project.

I have noticed that \$11 million has been appropriated for the island of Aitutaki, which will cover the Government Agencies, salaries all the way to the Old Age Pensions. This is what I mean when I say that \$11 million has been appropriated for Aitutaki, regardless of what our situation is, you will never find anybody who may have been laid off or being transitioned during COVID.

I support what the other two Members of Parliament are saying with what the Government has done in supporting our small businesses on Aitutaki with subsidies until it was ceased. The theme of this Budget, the 'Budget of Faith', reserves its purpose because we faithfully believe in ourselves and in God.

I wanted to thank the Island Administration for the wonderful work they do on our island, regardless of the negativity that exist, but is one area that we should not focus on wholeheartedly, but rather the positive side of not laying off employees. When this COVID stroke, I was very worried that 1996 might reoccur. Nevertheless, it never happened. It is because of the faith that we have for each other the reason why we got through this successfully.

I also wanted to acknowledge our former Prime Minister, Henry Puna, for leading us from the beginning right through to our current Prime Minister. The Government has done a lot for Aitutaki and if I list them all, it will take me one hour.

I also wanted to thank the Minister Responsible for the Ministry of Health, along with the Head of Ministry, Mr Bob Williams, and the entire staff and crew of the Ministry of Health. I am so thankful towards the Minister of Health because we have scored a new ambulance, a new pick up truck and the honour was bestowed upon me in presenting these new vehicles to the Ministry of Health in Aitutaki. They were not worried about purchasing airline tickets to travel across, they believed and trusted me to present these vehicles on their behalf. Thank you Honourable Minister.

These vehicles were then used to help support our people during COVID, delivering food parcels to households that were isolated and none of the households ever experienced hunger. They were well looked after by the Government.

In Aitutaki today, we are still in isolation and it is still active. The count on positive cases have reduced. Our thinking is to maintain the isolation until there is zero infection on the island.

I heard the Member for Amuri, the Honourable Member Junior Maoate, stating the condition of our water situation in Aitutaki. Thank you for bringing this to our attention. I wanted to inform you, not sure if you are listening, there was a time when you questioned the Government in this Honourable House of an update to the 200 water tanks for Aituaki. I would like to inform this Honourable House that a funding has been made available for the provision of these water tanks. Last week, I went to see Odie at ICI in which he confirmed that the money has been received for the water tanks. I am announcing this in this Honourable House to avoid you asking me or the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister had permitted me to respond to your question. I believe that you have been made aware of the situation on our island and that our people are in the hands of the Island Council Members, trying to figure out with them to how many water tanks will be distributed out.

It is correct that my Constituency always struggle with water shortage for one to two weeks. But we had faith in God and here it is, it is here. I believe that this problem about water shortage is not in Aitutaki only, but it is everywhere. Let me inform you all, for Aitutaki, when these water tanks arrives, each households will be able to take away two to three water tanks each, to store their drinking water. In terms of water, this is not a problem. We have survived from drinking water collected from above and not from below like the water you drink in Rarotonga.

Therefore, I would like to thank our people for not relying on what the Government can do to help. Instead, they went and purchased their own water tanks, especially with those who can afford to purchase one.

Listening to what is being said about proposals for the Private sectors and businesses to put aside some cash reserves for your own use should this pandemic strikes again. I will tell you the truth, all these businesses are well prepared with their cash reserves and the good thing about it, the Government never approached all these businesses to dig into their savings. Instead, the Government provided support to help their businesses proceed with no problems.

Therefore, if you want another trustworthy Government, we have the General Election around the corner and I urge our people to bring those same people back so that the Government can reserve another bag of cash reserves for another four to five years.

For now, I would like to thank the people of my Constituency, Arutanga/Reureu/Nikaupara, for the faith that you have placed in me to represent you. You have witnessed my generosity and the generosity of our Government and the time of war has come. Therefore, may God blesses you all.

I would like to raise one point on the Manatua Cable as mentioned earlier by my colleague. I want you to know that the reception in Aitutaki is really good. I do not know what my colleague is talking about, unless your phone is flat with aliens trying to communicate through to you. I sympathise our friends in the Outer Islands because this Cable has been installed in Aitutaki and all I could say is be patient. Sometimes, I try contacting my friends in the Outer Islands and you will find that there is no connection. Sometimes, the connection works and sometimes, it will just

drop. But for us in Aitutaki, our connection is 100 percent operational. I will find a way to help you with your connection. But if you bring this Government back into this House, I guarantee you that your connection issues in the Outer Islands will be dealt with

Before I take my seat, I just wanted to thank you my Constituency again and to tell them that I love you all. Thank you very much and God bless us all.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. That just proves that Aitutaki has problems in realising their phones being flat. I see the Honourable Member Agnes Armstrong; you have the Floor.

MRS A. ARMSTRONG: Thank you Mr Speaker. Kia orana to the House and everybody here. If I may, just a few words of greetings to my people. To my two Kavana in Ivirua, Kia Orana, *tangi ke, tangi ke, tangi ke rava*. To all the elders and all the people in Ivirua from one end to the other, our children, tangi ke rava. Greetings also to Numangatini and all the Aronga Mana around Mangaia. All our Church leaders and all denominations and all our people on Mangaia and from Mangaia, tangi ke, tangi ke rava in the love our our Lord.

As with previous Budgets the Opposition has supported the government in moving forward and so with this Budget the Opposition I am sure will support as you have heard from previous speakers because we cannot object. My learned friend here my colleague from Tamarua has spoken about issues that are affecting our island so I will not talk about those issues.

I will cover a few brief issues that I would like to highlight in this debate today and reserve my views on other individual vote items when we come to that. I briefly wanted to touch on projects that we have supposedly had come our way in Mangaia. We get something started but it is never completed due to lack of materials or maybe lack of funding. I find that hard because projects usually you have a Quantity Survey done and so all materials, et cetera, should be covered and brought across to Mangaia to complete the job. So I find it hard that we have a project that is sitting not completed for the last couple of months and I did ask people working on it and it's the lack of materials and this is for our hospital and I think that's a disgrace. But we won't go into details as I am sure someone will look into it for us.

There are other projects around water which have not been completed properly in which we were assured that there was Budget there and one area has not covered or we have not seen anything happen and unfortunately this is in my constituency of Ivirua. But we are a patient people, very, very patient but I thank my people for their patience and through that we will get there eventually.

The other issue that I would like to touch on is the Minimum Wage. I know \$8.50 is not much for people here in Rarotonga or maybe Aitutaki as well but 50 cents go a long way in the Pa Enuu. It would be nice to have more but my people are grateful for what they can get and we as MPs on the island we try to help our people wherever we can.

The other issue that I would like to touch on is the benefits for Caregivers. I had mentioned that in the previous Budget, it would be nice also to have an increase for those looking after our sick, the old people, it would be nice to have an increase there.

Lastly, I would like to comment on the Old Age Pension increase of \$20. As I have previously stated, we are grateful for that and if I was the Leader as you alluded, Mr Speaker I would cut taxes on old age pensioners and in saying that Mr Speaker, I conclude with my support of the Budget.

Thank you very much.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. If there is no other Members who wishes to speak, I will call upon the Honourable Minister. I see the Honourable Member Selina Napa; you have the Floor.

MRS S. NAPA: Kia Orana to us all in this Honourable House. Honourable Prime Minister and your Members of Parliament on your side, as well as Members on our side, Kia Orana. To the staff of Parliament, Mr Speaker, Clerk of Parliament and all your staff, Kia Orana to you all in the Name of our Lord. To the people of my Constituency, Titikaveka, Kia Orana to you all in the Name of our Lord. As we are faced with some challenges and work being carried out in our village, I just wanted to assure you that no matter what, I ask that we all work together in order for us to move forward.

I also wanted to greet all our women of the Cook Islands, Kia Orana to you all in the Name of our Lord. There goes a song, '*Kia aruru te enua katoa, i te akameitaki ia Iehova*', '*For the earth to tremble, in praising God*'.

I wanted to thank the Minister of Health, the Head of Ministry, Mr Bob Williams and all your staff. I also wanted to thank the staff in our Emergency Operation Centre of Titikaveka, Alistair MacQuarrie and his team, Papa Sonny Williams, Wally and all the others, the nurses working in the Clinic, as well as our volunteers that gave up their free time to support our pandemic programme in our village, may God bless you all.

I would also like to acknowledge the Cook Islands Red Cross Society for their support in assisting the Ministry of Health.

I would also like to acknowledge the managers and staff of Prime Foods Ltd as well as CITC for their sponsorship that went through Government for the food parcels that were delivered to those in isolation during COVID.

I recall two years ago when we started preparing ourselves for this virus, our whole village got together and worked along with the Government through the Ministry of Health for the process of putting a plan together in preparedness for COVID. Even with the Ministry of Agriculture in encouraging our families to plant crops for their own support.

When COVID arrived, I was amazed at the food parcels that were distributed to those in isolation. They had New Zealand food such as fruits like apples, pears, grapes, vegetables. The question is, where is our local food in these parcels? Therefore, this is an area that needs attention for us not to focus on a short term goal in terms of food, but rather a long term plan that will help support our agricultural plans in planting crops for our country.

My second issue is, I have always enjoyed watching the Minister Rose Toki-Brown on television in communicating to the people of the Cook Islands, reminding our people of our laws that is implemented by the Ministry of Health. I would say that she was the face of MOH and was the face of COVID in the past year. When COVID arrived, the Prime Minister took over the television show instead of the Minister Responsible for Health. Although I missed seeing her face on television, perhaps she is busy with her other responsibilities.

Back to our Appropriation Bill, I was shocked with how we got summoned for our Parliament to sit and to debate on this Bill. We were not ready for the Bill. Since I entered this Parliament, we always get guillotined for this Appropriation Bill, always, guillotine, guillotine, guillotine.

It has improved the last two years that we have come through because we have followed the procedures stipulated in our Standing Orders. Today, we have been forced to rush through the Budget.

One of the provisions in this Bill that I always support, the provisions under the National Environment Services. I did not see this in the Prime Minister's Ministerial Statement, neither in our Books. I believe that we should allocate some fundings to our Outer Islands to help with the sortation of white wear, e-wastes, scrap metals, abandoned vehicles that are lying around. When can we allocate an appropriation to help clean these rubbish in our country? This is a serious issue for us here in Rarotonga and also for some of the Outer Islands. Last year, there were groups who have applied for some fundings with GEF help them remove these wastes. Their application was approved but nothing came through to them to help them with this project of theirs. I can also see that a new application has been advertised in our local papers by GEF, and yet, GEF have not paid all the approved applications from last year.

Under Output 2 for the National Environment Services, \$40 thousand were allocated to help monitor our environment, to help support our environmental projects. There was also a \$150k allocated for EIA processes. I know that under our Rarotonga Environment Authority, the National Environment Services always approaches us Members of Parliament to help support their Appropriation allocations for the work they do.

Also, looking at this Appropriation Bill, I could not see any fundings that has been allocated for Muri Lagoon, our pilot projects in Takitumu for our septic tanks, which is a major disaster for Takitumu. The \$40 thousand that is being put aside for these projects will not cater for these projects of Takitumu.

My last point that I would like to talk about, the Rarotonga Cyclone Shelters Remediation, \$400 thousand was allocated to help upgrade the Cyclone Centres here in Rarotonga. I would like to ask the Honourable Prime Minister if he can allocate part of this funding to help with the upgrade of our Sunday School Hall in Titikaveka. We are currently in the process of renovating this Hall, anticipating for the 200 Years Celebration for the Bicentennial. The Sunday School Hall is also used as a Cyclone Shelter because we do not have one for Titikaveka. Not only that, you Members of Parliament need to remember that you also utilise this house for Government meetings,

Parliament and Select Committee meetings, it is in this Sunday School Hall where these meetings are held.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff from MFEM who were responsible for putting this Appropriation together because honestly, this is not an easy task. Therefore, I want to thank them all.

For this Appropriation Bill, I would like to give my support in line with my colleagues in this side. I believe that this Appropriation Bill will serve to support our people, Government employees, our elderlies, our children and so forth.

Philippians 4:4-5 says, *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near”*.

I also support what the Minister George Angene had said earlier for us all to *“live in peace and to be very careful with how we live”*.

Thank you and all the best to everyone.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Tingika Elikana; you have the Floor.

MR T. ELIKANA: First of all, Kia Orana to everyone who is here today in the Name of our Lord. I would like to thank Him for allowing this moment for us all to debate on the Appropriation Bill for our country. Mr Speaker, staff of Parliament, greetings to you all in the Name of our Lord. The Honourable Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament on the Government side, greetings to you all in the Name of our Lord. To the Opposition side, to your Leader who is not here today, hopefully she will join us sometimes this week, may the Lord be with you all and may He give you the skills and knowledge for the work you do in your individual Constituencies.

Mr Speaker, before I make my comments on the Merits of the Budget, I would like to add my congratulations to the Ministry of Health, the Minister, the Secretary and all who works within the Ministry of Health for the work they have done, which enabled us to reach the stage where we are now in terms of this pandemic. Also further thanks to those both in the private sector and the public sector who also contributed as mentioned by earlier speakers in us reaching the stage where we are now in terms of this response to COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, we heard the Prime Minister announced this is a Budget of keeping the Faith. We have come through two previous Budget cycles where we started with a Budget of Blessing and rightly so because at that time we counted our blessings because we put aside sufficient funds for us to weather the storm at the start of this COVID-19 pandemic. I am sure all of us will recall in the 2020 Budget that was presented in this House that the majority of the funding for that came from our reserves which the Honourable Prime Minister as Minister of Finance has put aside previously to enable us to face rainy days then.

In this cycle that we are going through we went from a Budget of Blessings to a Budget of Recovery and if I recall the Honourable Prime Minister as Minister of Finance clearly saying we are going through unpredictable times and requires an unpredictable response. As a result we have to look elsewhere for support from our development partners. I think we owe to our development partners for their support to enable us to weather the storm that we are going through. And in that respect we should say thanks to the one that has always been with us which is the Government of New Zealand and we should always provide them with preferential treatment in our country. So, Mr Speaker and I think it is timely to acknowledge the role that New Zealand has played in our recovery and continue to provide them with that preferential treatment if they ever decided to come on our shores.

Now, in the Budget that is currently before the House because of the good work that we have done and the good support that we have received from our development partners, now we are being asked to keep the faith and continue on the path towards recovery. That Mr Speaker is the role of a government, of a Minister of Finance who knows what he is doing and he will lead us to recovery, to the Promised Land if I may use those terms. As you would recall those of us who had the opportunity to attend the Budget Breakfast for the launch of this Budget during this current Budget that we are going through which we are just about to reach the end of the cycle we can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

With the new Budget starting on the 1st of July we are coming out of that tunnel and can see the Promised Land and I urge the Members of the Opposition to read the Budget carefully and in particular the Revenue Predictions that will be coming in to help us in our recovery and in response to the comments about time the timing of this Budget and the need for it to be passed before we go into the Elections is necessary because when we get into Elections and when we come back into government under the Cook Islands Party we do not want to be slowed down by Election Petitions so we have to wait for 6 months.

That is the reason why we need to pass the Budget we go into Elections so once we get back into office we hit the floor running. So, that is why we timed the Budget to have it passed before we go in the silly season. I have heard the comments made by previous speakers in regards the Budget especially the challenges that we face as a result of COVID-19 and the options available to us and one of those is which was more less promoted by commentators in the public arena and some political aspirants and some from the other side of the aisles that is for us to cut spending.

I think Mr Speaker we all can recall what happened in 1996. This government has learnt from that so it is not an option. As you can see today that's why we are asking our people to keep the faith in a government that is very responsible and will lead us out of this crisis that we are currently facing. The other option is to do nothing. Again that is not something your government is going to do. The third option which is the more favoured option by this government is to do something and do it well. We have kept our work force, we have in this Budget add a little bit to the minimum wage, we add a little bit extra for our old age pensioners and I must say because this government focused on affordability which others has come up with some big ideas of how we should spend government's money, this government looked at affordability and the Budget reflects that what we have got into our Budget is based on what we can afford.

I am pleased with the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition, newly crowned as you have alluded to Mr Speaker, who highlighted the difficulty if we are going to increase the minimum wage that people in the Outer Islands will face especially those with businesses who pay their workers anything more than the sum suggested of \$12 and \$15, and that is how thankful our people are in the Outer Islands, the Old Age Pension with the extra money they will get in their pension. My only comments to you is you are sitting on the wrong side. I think, like-minded people like yourself should sit together so we can drive this beautiful country of ours to the promised land.

I think we also need to be looking at the returns what we can get from our Budget. Much has been talked about the developments in the Outer Islands particularly in the Northern Group islands. Questions were raised in the Public arena about development on Penrhyn with the Centres, their new hospital for Tetautua and then the development for Manihiki, the new Administration Government buildings and also Pukapuka's hospital and the harbor for Nassau. Unfortunately, a lot also made comments about diversification from tourism because that is just that, words. I haven't heard any Member from the Opposition or even with these commentators in the public arena providing how we should diversify, where we should diversify and what we need to diversify from.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Tingika Elikana. I see the Honourable Albert Nicholas; you have the Floor.

MR A. NICHOLAS: I stand to move a Motion:

That the speaking time for the Hon Member Elikana be extended

MR SPEAKER: I call for a Secunder please?

Secinded by the Honourable Member, Tereapii Maki-Kavana

MR SPEAKER: The Question is:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

Honourable Member, I think you have five minutes.

MR T. ELIKANA: Mr Speaker, I was just talking about development in the Northern Group islands in particular. I will not talk about all of them just focus on very important development that will have an impact on our economy. You will recall, Mr Speaker and I think most of us will recall when the Prime Minister at the Budget breakfast raised the issue of development on Manihiki airport and also the Penrhyn airport.

Coupled with that is his successful trip to Tahiti for discussions on potential air links. Those air links if established, Mr Speaker will enable visitors to our paradise to have the opportunity either to fly to Rarotonga or fly directly to the Northern Group and that could provide job opportunities

for people on those islands of Manihiki and Penrhyn if that eventuate and that will increase the market available for our tourism and surely, Mr Speaker I am sure everyone can follow. It will have an impact on our revenue. Not only that, it provide economic opportunities for the people in the Northern Group and Mr Speaker, I look forward to that time because I will be sending the Nassau Ferry from Pukapuka to take taro, fish to help with the tourist accommodations on Manihiki and Penrhyn. That again will improve Pukapuka with the export of taro and fish opportunities to these two other islands.

So we do not, Mr Speaker have to look at the big picture items we have to look within what we can do in our country and Mr Speaker, it saddens me that connectivity has become an issue and some Members particularly those of the Opposite side of the isles seem to be pointing the finger at government. Fortunately, for the islands of Pukapuka and Nassau they have a Member of Parliament who thinks well ahead of his time because I do not have those problems when I go to Pukapuka. You see me zoom into Parliament, you see me zoom into Cabinet because it's available on Pukapuka and there is no lag time. We have Kuki Net providers, we have Vodafone and soon to have Star Link but I have some issues with Star Link. So Mr Speaker, connectivity depends on us Members of Parliament to look at the opportunities out there and try to connect between your island and Rarotonga.

Because of time, Mr Speaker I would like to touch on something very important in terms of the Budget which some of the Members had mentioned it in passing that is our ability to respond if we are faced with some shocks or some issues, disasters in the next couple of months. As I said earlier on, we have a very responsible, diligent, meticulous Finance Minister who went out of his way to make sure if such an event is to occur then we will be able to respond.

That Mr Speaker is the Contingency Fund available to us through ADB which is not added into our debts but can be drawn if the need arises.

That Mr Speaker is the sign of a Finance Minister, leader of a nation that you can put your trust in and keep the faith. That comes only from years of experience of handling public funds for all those years. That is why I have issues if the purse of this country is handed to those on the other side of the House. I urge the people listening in to Parliament this afternoon to keep the faith and maintain it until such time we reach the promise land. Kia Orana and thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member, now I see the Honourable Minister Robert Tapaitau; you have the Floor.

HON. R. TAPAITAU: First of all greetings to you Mr Speaker, Clerk and staff of Parliament, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord. Please, if I could be allowed some time to greet my people.

To the people of Tongareva, Mayor, Council Members, Kia Orana. To our Church Ministers, the different Denominations, Kia Orana. To the Executive and Government staff, Kia Orana. To our Land Holdings staff who is building our Hospital in Tetautua, Kia Orana. To our CICC Church in Omoka, who is building our Reverend's residential house, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord.

I rise to comment on the Appropriation Bill, the “*Keeping the Faith*” Budget. Just earlier, I heard one of the Members saying for us not to trust in men. I believe that this Appropriation Bill, God has given the skills and knowledge to those responsible in putting it together.

As I was reading the newspaper earlier, one of the Members said that “this Budget is a joke”. This kind of comments should not be used to criticise our own people for putting this Budget together. It was our own people who works at MFEM that had prepared for this Budget, informing our Prime Minister at the same time the structural breakdowns of the Budget. These are the same people that brought us through the last two years with previous Budgets. To me, I praise God for this because we had no interruptions to the Old Age Pensions, to the salaries of our employees, these are the things that we need to look at.

The to-be-Leader of the Opposition was saying earlier that the 50cents increase in the Minimum Wage is huge for us in the Outer Islands. Therefore, let us not talk about this. One of the Members was saying earlier for us to work together. Is this what mean about working together? This is nowhere near working together. As the Member of Pukapuka/Nassau had said earlier on our behalf of the Northern Group islands, “work together!” But then, you the Opposition went on the radio and said that these allocations for these projects for the Northern Groups islands is a complete waste of money. This includes the Hospital for Penrhyn, the runway for Manihiki, the Administration building for Manihiki, the wharf in Pukapuka, all these things, he said, it is a waste of money. To our Northern Group people, these are the things that they are saying about you and I know that you all heard them. Are you not people of this country? Are you not Cook Islanders for these people to criticise you? If they truly mean for us to work together, then by all means, come and speak to us.

This Appropriation Bill truly is about FAITH.

We believed that God was the one who led us through this pandemic. We also believed that God will release us from this pandemic. I do not know about the Opposition side, but the Government, I know that our side is committed in our work. Faith without work is dead. It goes hand in hand. That is what it is for today. When we say for us to work together, let us work together. I hardly criticise you in Public and I do not want to criticise you because we are one. We are all the same in this House. You are trying your best in your own Constituency I am doing the same as well. It is of no use for you to go on the radio, let us communicate to each other. On the radio, you will only get animosity. When I look at this Appropriation Bill, it is a good one because our wishes are being granted.

I would like to thank the Minister of Health, her Secretariat, staff of Ministry of Health, may God bless you all.

I would also like to acknowledge our Prime Minister. I will not repeat everything because the Honourable Tingika Elikana had said it all.

All I can say is, praise the Lord for granting our Prime Minister the wisdom in leading our country.

I also give thanks to God for what I am going through right now. To the Government, thank you what you do.

Earlier today, one of the Members said that we have a lot of debts. Hold on, are you concerned more about the debts we owe than the lives of our people? All I could see is Government looking after our people. To all of us in this House, we have spoken about team work, let us work together as a team. Like you said, we have come hand in hand walking through this pandemic, let us keep it going. I wanted to make it clear that the benefits of all of this is for our people, not for ourselves. This is what we strive for.

I think I will finish here because my time is up. May the grace of God be with you all, Kia Orana and all the best.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. I see the Honourable Prime Minister. Sorry, I see the Honourable Member William Heather; you have the Floor.

MR W. HEATHER: Thank you very much Mr Speaker and greetings to all Members in this Honourable House. Firstly, I would like to thank the Prime Minister of New Zealand, the government and the people of New Zealand who is listening to our broadcast today, for the \$50 million that they have given us to help our nation during this pandemic.

On behalf of our Leader, I would like to thank the people and the Government of Australian, for their generosity in providing us with KUKUPA II that will help serve the people of our country.

I would also like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for the support that he had given to the people of my Constituency, Ruauu. Thank you Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker, in this moment, I would like to ask you if I can be spared a time to greet my people of Ruauu. Kia Orana to the Kaumaiti and to the different sectors of our suburb. Kia Orana to our Church Ministers and the different Denominations within our Constituency.

Mr Speaker, I was enjoying listening to the Member of Parliament from Pukapuka/Nassau. It was very interesting to his speech, it seemed that he had memorized his speech. I also wanted to greet our Deputy Prime Minister, the Honourable Member for Tongareva. Mr Speaker, both these Honourable Members forgot what they did to me back in 2018 in reference to a Bill that was passed in this Honourable House. We looked at tar-sealing our road, it is here where these eggs are hatching and I believe that it is our responsibility to care these hens laying their eggs. Mr Speaker, I am not sure what happened to the \$3 million that was allocated for this project. If their intention is for us to work together, yes that is what we aim to do, for us all to work together. However, there will always be disagreement if we do not work together in this House.

Mr Speaker, when we look at some of the Ministries, they have failed. Agriculture, the Ministry of Health and Infrastructure, they have all failed. This is because we do not work together. If we refer back to our last Budget, our Outer Islands were diversified. We need to put a proposal together in helping our Outer Islands as well, not just Rarotonga. I find this very disappointing. When I spoke on that day, there was a Point of Order and I had to cease my speech.

Therefore, Mr Speaker and all Honourable Members of this House, I am a very peaceful person but if we do not work together, something else will burst out me.

Our shipping services today, we can see that there are no ships at all, except for the barge. All the other ships are on dock. What can we do to help our people from the Northern Group? Do you expect us not to say anything?

In reference to why I said that the Ministry of Agriculture have failed, in the past, we used to export. Today, we do not export anymore. This could be the result of COVID, but it cannot be because this happened before COVID, this resulted with Agriculture going down.

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Member, I will have to interrupt you as our time is up. You can continue tomorrow when we return to our Parliament Sitting. We now have come to the end of our business for today and I call upon the Leader of the House.

MS T. BROWN: Thank you Mr Speaker. I move that:

Standing Order 54 (2) and 54 (3) be suspended and that Parliament do now adjourn until 10.00 a.m. tomorrow, Wednesday 25th with a break at 11.30 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. and resume until 2.30 p.m. with a break from 2.30 p.m. to 3.00 p.m. and continue until 5.00 p.m. These Sitting times also apply for Thursday, 26th and Friday, 27 May 2022

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Leader of the House.

I call for a Secunder to the Motion?

Secinded by the Honourable Member, William Heather

MR SPEAKER: The Question is:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Members for your hard work today. Now that we have come to the end of our business for today, may I please ask the Honourable Member William Heather to close our Sitting with a Closing Prayer?

CLOSING PRAYER by the Honourable Member, William Heather

MR SPEAKER: Parliament is now adjourned until 10.00 a.m. tomorrow, Wednesday, 25 May 2022.

Sitting adjourned at 4.59 p.m.